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Reformation and Union

RECOMMENDED, as the

Present DUTY and INTEREST

OF THE

NATION:

IN A

SERMON

PREACH'D at the

ASSIZES

HELD AT

HERTFORD,

August the 1st, 1698.

By *RI. SKINGLE,*
Vicar of *ROYDON* in *ESSEX.*

LONDON,
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Reformation and Union

To the Worſhipful

JOHN BILLERS Eſq:

High Sheriff

Of the COUNTY of

HERTFORD

Honoured Sir,

THE *Cenſures and Aſperſions caſt upon what you lately heard from me in the Pulpit, have obliged me to preſent you with the ſame from the Preſs, which I have here done without any omiſſion or alteration. When you firſt engaged me in that Honourable Service, of Preaching before the Judges, and many other Perſons in publick Stations, I thought I had a fit opportunity given me, to recount the great Bleſſings of late beſtowed on the Nation, and to preſs Reformation and Union, as the ſutable return to God, and the ſeaſonable and proper Method, for the continuing our Enjoyments to us: And, I hope, what I then delivered, will, upon ſerious peruſal, find a kind reception by*

all

all that wish well to the Nation, and desire to see Religion in the Life and Power of it. Indeed, I cannot but think, we neglect both Duty and Interest, while these Things are not seriously and in earnest undertaken; what's fit to be done, as also the way and means to effect the same, must be left to Authority, but attempts of this Nature I hope to see; and would willingly perswade my self, that we are not so far left of God, but that such a blesse dWork, so begun, and followed, will be surely accompanied with a good event. I shall add no more, but the acknowledgment of your favours to me, and my Prayer to God to bless you and yours, especially with all Spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, and this is, and shall be heartily done, by

I

Your Humble and

Obliged Servant

R. Skingle.

A SERMON

PREACH'D at the

ASSIZES

HELD AT

HERTFORD

August the First, 1698.

Psalm 126. 3.

The Lord hath done great things for us.

WHEN the *Grecians* were set free by *Flaminius* the *Roman* General, 'tis said, their Joy was too big for their Hearts; they scarce believed their own Ears, when the Cryer proclaim'd their Liberty, but bad him say over that sweet Word *Liberty* again, and look'd upon one another with wonderment, *Velut somnia vanam speciem.* Somewhat like hereunto was the case of the

Jews, upon the deliverance acknowledg'd in this Psalm, *When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream:* So great was the Salvation brought unto them, that they could hardly believe it; but when they saw 'twas a real thing, then (say they) *our Mouth was fill'd with laughter, and our Tongue with singing*; yea, then they own their Deliverance to the Honour of God, and say, *The Lord hath done great things for us.*

Hence then we are to make this Observation, that God is pleas'd to work in a very eminent manner for the welfare of his People; and when he doth so, its their duty to take notice of it. So great was this deliverance, that even their very Enemies could not but acknowledge it; then they among the Heathen said, *The Lord hath done great things for them.* Yea, so wonderfully hath God appear'd for his People, that their Enemies have seemingly come over to them; we read in the Book of *Esther*, that God so disppointed their designs, that many of them became *Jews*. And so mightily did God shew himself for *David*, that even *Saul* could think fit to speak him fair; yea, God so settled him in the Government, and so prosper'd him, *That a People whom he had not known, offer'd him service, and strangers submitted themselves unto him*, Ps. 18. 44. Indeed, prosperity-Proselites are not to be presently trusted, for fear the sting should still be in them, and that safety and opportunity might encourage them to thrust it out; but yet, however, such forced (tho' feigned) submissions, shew the greatness of a Deliverance, and how wonderfully God is pleased to own his Servants. But we need not go further for the proof of this, then our own late Experience will carry us: What a dismal condition

was

was the Nation in, when it was a dangerous thing to be truly Religious; nay, indeed, truly Moral, when he that parted from iniquity, made himself a prey thereby? When all the desires and attempts by just and due methods to make us happy, were frustrated, and the strugglings of honest Men were but like those of Slaves, which ended in a more cruel Bondage; in short, tho' we had then to do with those, who went under the Name of Protestants, yet were our Lives and Liberties, in the Hands of violence and oppression. And to help forward the glorious design of Popery and Slavery, we were desired to believe, that all must be submitted to the discretion of the Prince, and so even life it self (which is not in our own Power to dispose of) must be tamely given up to the barbarous Will of another. And according to this preparatory Work, our most Holy Religion, was soon after, ready to be overwhelm'd with Popish Superstition and Idolatry; our Nation swarm'd with Priests and Jesuits, and *hiss* Cut-throats; and why should we think they would have slipt such a meritorious act, and lost such an excellent preservation against the pains of Purgatory, as the murdering multitudes of us, if God had not most miraculously put a stop to their fury? Surely if the Lord himself had not been on our side when they rose up against us, they had swallowed us up; the proud Waters had gone over our Soul: But blessed be the Lord, he hath not given us as a Prey unto their Teeth; our Soul is escaped, as a Bird out of the Snare of the Foulers; the Snare is broken, and we are delivered. Deliver, did I say? Yea, not only so, but we have now a Prince set over us, who designs good unto us, even the glorious Instrument of our mighty Deliverance; A Prince,

who

who is alone in qualifications, for such an Heroick undertaking: A Prince endued with great Wisdom, and undoubted Courage, and whom all Men justly admire in the Exercise of both; and unto whom all *Europe* stand ready to pay their respects and duty: A Prince, by whose Hand, God hath not only led us out of *Egypt*, and given us a sight of *Canaan*, but whom God hath enabled also to conduct us into the Land of Rest. And who (maugre the greatest efforts to the contrary) is the Instrument of an honourable Peace; a thing which our Enemies laugh'd at our expectation of, and when actually concluded, yet did think incredible. These are proofs sufficient, that God is pleased to appear in a very eminent manner, for the welfare of his People. The other branch of the Doctrine. That it is their Duty to take notice thereof, is also so plainly in the Text, and doth so naturally result from the former, that I need not enlarge in the confirmation of it; he must be strangely lost to every thing that is manly, and not have one rational thought about him, that will not argue from Mercy to Duty, from Deliverance to Obedience: Yea surely, if God hath delivered us out of the Hands of our Enemies, 'tis highly reasonable that we should serve him without fear of them, in holiness and righteousness all the Days of our lives.

And so much for the Doctrinal part of this Discourse, I shall now pass on to that which is plainly Consequential of what hath been said; And,

First, Are these our Mercies, and this our Duty; Then, according to our Duty, let us ascribe our Mercies to him, from whom they came: Let us own God the Author, of every wise Resolution taken for us, of every proper Method us'd for our God, and

of

of all the Advantages that have accru'd to us. 'Tis true, we are bound to love, and honour also, the blessed Instrument of our Enjoyments; and to hate that unworthy Carriage, to think of dealing with him, as the Traveller doth with the refreshing Fountain, who kneels down to it when he is thirsty, and in Want, and turns his back upon it when his Turn is serv'd. This, in our Case, is a very base Temper, to be abhorr'd by all: But yet we must remember that no Man hath an Heart, or an Hand, Skill, Will, or Ability to do us good, but from God.

2. *Hath God done Great Things for us?* Then let us take heed of Uneasiness under his Gracious Dispensations towards us; an unworthy Temper, very incident to our fickle and unconstant Natures. The *Israelites* were a very strange Example herein; they repented them of their Complying with their Deliverance, and had a Regret that they were brought out of * *Egypt*; they were angry that they were Free-men: Nay, such a Distraction had seized them, that they spake of taking *Moses* from the Place where God, by an extraordinary Providence, had set him for their Benefit, and of returning to their *Egyptian* Tyrants. Now this is a very stupid, ungrateful Demeanour, which we are to avoid. And on the contrary, and in the

* Charnock, *on the Attributes of God.*

3d Place, *If God hath done Great Things for us*, let us be truly thankful to him. Blessed be God, if he hath not *assuag'd the Malice*, yet that he hath *abated the Pride, and confounded the Devices of our Enemies.* Indeed, God suffer'd them to have a Day, and we beheld the Wicked in great Prosperity; but, blessed be God, Light hath sprung out of Darkness, and we have now, a very Comfortable Day shining upon us. Indeed, Taxes have been,

and are, great; but, truly, after all, an eaſie Compoſition for the Security of the whole, even all that is dear unto us. Bleſſed be God that our *Liberties* were not *Finally Subverted*, nor we *Depriv'd* of our moſt Holy *Religion*. We know not what *Dragooning* is, any further than by Report: We quietly profeſs God's Sacred Truth, and poſſeſs the Rights and Inheritances of our Fathers. And, bleſſed be God, we have alſo a *King*, of whom it may be ſaid, he came to ſeek the Welfare of us all: A *King*, that ſets up no Intereſt, ſeparate from that of his People's; and of whoſe Actions, not a ſingle Inſtance can be given, that looks not like his deſigning Good to the Nation, the making of us truly happy, and the ſecuring of it to our Poſterity. And, Oh! what Praiſe is alſo due unto God, as for the Giving of him to us, ſo for the Merciful Preſervation of him! How eminently hath God appear'd herein? Indeed, he ſuffer'd the Sons of *Belial* to contrive his Deſtruction; but even that barbarous Deſign it ſelf, was not only moſt graciouſly defeated, but alſo ſo over-ruled for our Good, that it (perhaps) prov'd the Means of ſaving the Nation. How ſeaſonably did it awaken us, and give us to conſider a-new, how much our Intereſt lies, in the Preſervation of the King? What a freſh and moſt convincing Argument alſo had the King immediately, of the Nation's good Affection to him? And how opportunely did it ſhew the World, the *Parliament* and *People's* due Zeal for his Perſon and Government? And put the Parliament upon making ſuch Laws for our Security, as, perhaps, would not elſe have been thought of; and without which, it may be we might have been undone. Thus hath our gracious God even *turn'd our Enemies Swords into*

to their own Bowels, and their Artillery on their own Breaſts: Let us then be thankful unto him.

4. *If God hath done Great Things for us,* Then let this induce us to a firm Reliance on him; yet ſo, as not to neglect the Means for our Security. *Jehoſhaphat*'s Eyes were towards God, and he excited his Subjects to Confidence in the Almighty; yet he did not neglect the Security of Outward Means. To rely on God, and to caſt off Humane Help, is, to truſt his Power, againſt his Command; and to pretend to glorifie his Strength, againſt his Sovereignty. God's uſual Way is, to exerciſe his Power in giving Life and Succeſs to Second Cauſes, and Prudent Endeavours: And in this Way it is, that we are to depend upon him.

5. *If God hath done Great Things for us,* Then let us remember the Churches abroad, who are perſecuted for Righteouſneſs ſake; the Thoughts whereof ſhould ſtrike deep into our Hearts, and our Bowels ought to be towards them: And while they write Lamentations to us, we ſhould ſend up Lamentations to God for them. We find it thus charged as a very great Fault, in *Amos* 6. 7. *They drink Wine in Bowls, and anoint themſelves with the chief Ointment, but they are not grieved for the Afflictions of* Joſeph. Let us ſeriouſly think hereof, and know that we are bound to do what we can for them; and that the leaſt we can do, is, to cry mightily unto God, that he would graciouſly vouchſafe unto them the like Mercies and Deliverances to what we do enjoy.

6thly, and Laſtly, *If God hath done Great Things for us,* Then what do we do for God, and for the Continuation of what he hath done for us? And here I crave Leave to ſuggeſt two Things, which

which I humbly conceive are very proper herein: The First is, *A Thorough Reformation:* And the Second, *That some effectual Course be taken for the Uniting of us.* Indeed, these are Things that tend much to the helping forward one another, *Reformation-Union*, and *Union-Reformation*; and both of them very much our Duty, and as much the Nations Interest. I begin with the

First, *A Thorough Reformation.* Of this, in Church Matters, I shall only at present say, Oh that God would purge all his Churches from their Dregs; and I easily persuade my self, that every good Man will readily join with me herein: When, O Lord, when shall it once be? Oh that it might be! But that which I shall urge and press here, shall be the Reformation of Men's Lives and Conversations: I mean, That some speedy Course be us'd, for the Suppressing that Drunkenness, and Uncleanness, Swearing, Perjury, Prophanation of the *Lord's Day*, and the like, which hath over-spread the Nation; and for encouraging of Piety, and Holy Living. Something of this nature, I hear, is done in some places, as also by some in this County, to their great Honour: And God's Blessing upon their Hearts for it. Such are the Men that are likely to serve their Country; and such are Persons that we are to have a Value for. But, alas! What hath yet been done, is by so few, that still the Practical Language of the greater Number among us, is like that of *Pharaoh, Who is the Lord, that we should obey him?* Many live as if they question'd his Being, and more his Authority: Such Provocations are common with us, as even dare God to his Face; as if Men took Encouragement from the Influences of his Goodness, to mount to a greater Degree of Sin; after a fair

Sun-

Sun-ſhine of Mercy, to entertain more unbridl'd Reſolutions; and to paſs forward with more Licentiouſneſs, to bind themſelves ſtronger to their Iniquity, by that which ſhould bind them faſter to their Duty. Now, When will all our Magiſtrates be pleas'd to take notice of this; and to the utmoſt Extent of their Power and Influence, (as they are in Duty bound,) put a Stop to it? I know they will aſſuredly ſay unto us that Proverb, *Phyſicians heal your ſelves, and firſt do your Parts herein.* And I moſt readily own, that to be Enſamples to our People, is very much our Duty; and to let them know that Sin is the Ruin, as well as the Reproach, of any Nation; and that *for theſe Things, the Wrath of God cometh on the Children of Diſobedience:* Nay, to bring off our Hearers, from all ſuch Doctrines as but tend to the upholding them in their Evil Ways; to deliver a wary and ſober Senſe of the Efficacy and Benefit of the Sacraments; to warn them againſt taking up with Church-Privileges, like thoſe who cry'd, *The Temple of the Lord,* and bleſs'd themſelves in their being *Abraham*'s Children, tho' they minded nothing leſs than the treading in the Steps of *Abraham*'s Faith and Obedience; of ſatisfying themſelves with being within the Pale of the Church, and a bare Performance of the outward Duties; of thinking their Attendance on the *Lord's Day,* a Licenſe to live looſly all the Week after, and a quitting Scores with God for what was paſt. In ſhort, That he that will acquit himſelf like a Chriſtian, muſt give himſelf to the Lord, 1 *Cor.* 2. 8, 5. That is, (as our Church expreſſeth it moſt excellently,) * *He muſt offer and preſent himſelf, his Soul and Body, to be a Reaſonable, Holy and Lively Sacrifice to God;* † *giving up himſelf to his Service, and walking before him*

* *See the Communion-Office.*

† *The General Thankſgiving.*

him in Holineſs and Righteouſneſs all his Days. All this, with all the Encouragement we are able to give to Pious and Godly Living, I acknowledge to be incumbent upon us. But then there is alſo much lying before Magiſtrates, in this good Work; and this (with Submiſſion) I take to be their proper Buſineſs, who are to be a Terrour to Evil-Works, *Rom.* 13. 3. And were but one half of that Vigour exerted for the Suppreſſion of Prophaneneſs and Immorality, which was formerly expreſs'd by ſome others, for the puniſhing of Men in the Matters of their God, we ſhould ſoon ſee a bleſſed Alteration. Shall I then ſpeak freely of two or three of the fore-mention'd Evils? (tho' not of them with Deſire to exclude or abate your Zeal againſt any of the reſt, of the ſame kind.) There is Curſing, and Prophane Swearing; 'tis very ſad that it ſhould be ſo found among us, and Pariſh-Officers not moſt ſtrictly requir'd to take notice of it: And whoever obſerves how careleſly and impudently Oaths are taken, (eſpecially if to ſerve a Turn,) and what is frequently given in Evidence at ſuch a time as this; and what Oaths to diſcharge Offices are often ſwallow'd, and how little, if at all, regarded; will ſoon be convinc'd how needful it is to obſerve very ſtrictly when any come within the Verge of Perjury, and to puniſh it according to its due Merit. And then, for the Prophanation of the *Lord's Day*; 'tis plain that it is not only the thing that be-dwarfs Men's Religion, by cramping the Advantages to be gotten by the publick Miniſtery, but is a great Cauſe why the Attendance on it is ſo much neglected.

And now, Right Honourable, and much Honoured; the King tells us once and again, that he doth moſt earneſtly deſire, and ſhall endeavour a general

general Reformation in the Lives and Manners of all his Subjects; 'tis obvious then where it muſt ſtick, if it be not effected. Be up then, be up and a doing in this good Work, (I moſt humbly, but earneſtly beſeech you,) and the Lord be with you.

And here will the Learned and Reverend Judges of the Nation, allow me one Word to them in particular? Why, then, it is this; That they would be pleas'd to remember, that there is much expected from them in this Matter, not only from their High and Honourable Stations, (for they are always the ſame,) but from thoſe high Thoughts the Nation hath of them, and the mighty Veneration that is juſtly entertain'd for them. There is no Man but will own, that God exceedingly bleſs'd the Nation, in directing the King to ſuch an excellent, and very extraordinary Choice of Perſons, when he fill'd thoſe great Places. Now, as *Nehemiah* argu'd, from his Place of great Truſt, and from the Graces and Gifts of the Spirit of God in him, ſaying, *Shall ſuch a Man as I flee?* Thus we are all ready to ſay, *Such Judges as the Nation is now favour'd with, will go a great way in this Work.* Yea, let every one do his part herein, there is none ſo mean, but may ſet an Helping Hand to this; if not otherwiſe, yet by Family or Perſonal Reformation: Every one is a King, a Prieſt, and a Prophet in his own Family; and the Neglect of Parents and Maſters, (eſpecially of ſuch as have any way the Addition of Outward Greatneſs,) in ſetting good Examples, and commanding their Children and Houſhold to keep the Way of the Lord, is the Riſe and Continuance of all Prophaneneſs. What a brave Change is it then, in the power of ſuch, to make in the

World?

World? And as for Perſonal Reformation, every one, in this Caſe, hath a Corporation within himſelf, and hath Authoriry to arraign and execute every Rebel againſt God, and the Peace of his Soul. And if he wants Help againſt his Trayterous Luſts, he may call in the Divine Aid; and if he will but be directed by it, he will not fail to cut off the Heads of thoſe Uncircumciſed, and to lay all thoſe Sons of *Anake* flat. Stir up your ſelves then, ſtir up your ſelves in this manner, againſt Sin. Yea, let thoſe that profeſs above the common Rate, ſee what is amiſs; ſee their Coldneſs and Formality in Religion, their Compliances with the ſinful Humours of the Age; their making themſelves free to all Companies and Cuſtoms, their Looſneſs, their Earthlineſs, the Decays and ſad Declinings in Religion that are to be found in them; truly reform theſe things, and be always upon their Guard for the future, even till they ſee every *Egyptian* dead upon the Shoar. This is that which God expects from us; and this is the way to have him go on to do us good.

And ſo I paſs to the other Thing which I propos'd, when I began this uſe, which is, *That ſome effectual Courſe be taken for the uniting of us*; and the more to diſpoſe unto this Heavenly Work, I beg that theſe following particulars be conſidered.

I. That Infallibility is not lodg'd with any Men; we all know but in part; and to bring it home to what I am ſpeaking to, let me uſe the Language of a Reverend Perſon before the King; ſpeaking of Diſſenters, *We* (ſaith he) *ſuppoſe them to be miſtaken in the Things wherein they differ from us*, and perhaps they are ſo; but yet we muſt conſider, that we our ſelves alſo are but Men, and therefore may

Dr. Wake *in a Sermon at* Hampton-Court, *in* 1689 *p.* 21.

err;

err; and they as verily think us in the wrong, as we do them: and for ought I know, we must leave it to the Day of Judgment to decide the Controversie, which of us is in the right. *Amen*, good Lord, *Amen.*

II. Consider the temper of the Gospel, requiring Meekness and forbearing one another in Love; when the Disciples were so fierce, as to suspend one who was working a Miracle in Christ's Name, only because he did not follow them, our Lord immediately order'd a relaxation. And for our Apostle, we find the same mind was in him that was also in Christ, *Rom.* 14. which whole Chapter, if it were well consider'd, would be of great use in this business; and here let me give you the thoughts of a Right Reverend Divine of ours; *There is scarce* (saith he) *a more unaccountable thing to be imagined, then to see a company of Men professing that Religion, a great and main Precept whereof is mutual Love, Forbearance, Gentleness of Spirit, and compassion to all sorts of Persons, and agreeing in all the Essential parts of that Doctrine, differing only in some less material and more disputable things, yet maintaining those differences with a Zeal so disproportioned to the value of them, prosecuting all that disagree from them with all possible violence; and if they want means to use outward Force, with all bitterness of Spirit. This* (saith he) *must needs astonish every Impartial Beholder.* But,

The Bishop of Sarum, *in his Preface to that excellent Book call'd,* The Life of God, in the Soul of Man.

III. If we are indeed what we esteem our selves to be, the strong in the Faith; then let it be remember'd, that it is to such as we are that St. *Paul* addresseth himself, *Rom.* 15. 1. *requiring us not to please our selves*; and in the seventh Verse of the same Chapter, *to receive one another, as Christ also receiveth us to the Glory of God.* And in the third of *Phil.*

ſeems to intimate, *that wherein any differ'd from them, to leave them to God; and as far as they were agreed, to walk by the ſame rule, and to mind the ſame things.* ver. 15, 16.

IV. Conſider the Miſchiefs the want hereof brings; the publick is deprived of the Labours of many Learned and Godly Men; and upon this account alſo is it, that inſtead of Loving one another, as our Lord hath given us Commandment, the one ſide crys out, Perſecutors, and Men of cruel and bitter Spirits; the other Schiſmaticks, and as if Men of another Religion; and no ſooner is either ſide heated with this Coal, but like a burning Candle, whoſe Tallow is mixt with Brine, ſpit up and down the Room. And what advantages hath the common ~~Enmity~~ enemy got by theſe Feuds? And where are they ſo like to have an after-Game, as from our Diviſions?

V. And Laſtly, let the Things which are and have been the matter in Difference be well conſidered, are they Things of abſolute neceſſity to Salvation? Is Heaven at ſtake? Indeed, we muſt not deſtroy the Principles of Chriſtianity, out of Zeal to enlarge the Communion of Chriſtians; but it is always owned, that theſe are Things that do not at all concern the Foundations either of Faith or Worſhip. Let's all then, in what's proper for our places, ſhew a publick Spirit, and contribute towards an Union, yea, he that can do no more, yet by his Prayers for it. And, O Lord God, help, and give Men Underderſtanding to conſider the neceſſity of it; *I confeſs, prudence muſt accompany our Zeal herein, otherwiſe, like ill order'd Phyſick, it may exaſperate the Diſeaſe, rather than remove it; but while we pretend Prudence, let us take heed of

Dr. Wake *in the formentioned Sermon.*

*to be warm, sincere, and vigorous for it;

Luke

Lukewarmneſs, and indifferency herein: There is too much Neutrality amongſt us, directly oppoſite to the temper of our Lord, whoſe Zeal for Godlineſs and Purity of Worſhip, even eat him up. O that this were well conſidered by us! And that we might alſo ſee Mens Zeal for Religion, overpoiſe Ambition, Secular Deſigns, and Worldly Grandeur, then would Chriſtianity ſoon be reduced to this its Primitive temper. And then the envy of *Ephraim* ſhall depart, and the adverſaries of *Judah* ſhall be cut off; *Ephraim* ſhall not envy *Judah*, nor *Judah* vex *Ephraim*; but they ſhall flee upon the Shoulders of the *Philiſtines* towards the Weſt, and ſpoil them of the Eaſt together; they ſhall lay their Hand upon *Edom* and *Moab*, and the Children of *Ammon* ſhall obey them; and the Lord ſhall utterly deſtroy the Tongue of the *Egyptian-Sea*; and then Glory ſhall dwell in our Land, all Hearts, Heads, and Hands ſhall be at Work, to promote the welfare of the Nation, utterly to root out Popery and Prophaneneſs, and to countenance real Piety and Good Living. Yea, the Kingdom of thy dear Son, O Lord, will then come, and all his Enemies be made his Footſtool; Come then, thus, O Bleſſed Jeſus, come quickly.

FINIS.